

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-11 OMB-01 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 EA-11 DRC-01 COME-00 LAB-06 SIL-01 NIC-01

NEA-14 /146 W

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R 101519Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8978

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL MUNICH

DIA WASH DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 2469

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, EGEN, PINT, RO

SUBJECT: MORE ON FIRE AT ROMANIAN TRUCK ASSEMBLY PLANT

REF: BUCHAREST 2387

1. SUBSEQUENT REPORTS HAVE TENDED TO CONFIRM FACTUAL PICTURE OF MAJOR BRASOV INDUSTRIAL FIRE DESCRIBED REFTEL. EMBASSY SOURCES WHO WERE PRESENT AND ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN FIGHTING BLAZE NOW SAY DAMAGE ESTIMATED AT 120 MILLION LEI. THESE SOURCES SAY THAT HARD-TO-EXTINGUISH FIRE STARTED IN ASSEMBLY LINE AREA NIGHT OF JUNE 2-3, POSSIBLY THROUGH SHORT-CIRCUIT, THEN SPREAD TO PAINT SHOP AND TIRE WAREHOUSE. ALTHOUGH SIDES OF PLANT ARE STILL STANDING, CHARRED ROOF CAVED IN. QUICKIE WHITEWASH COAT HAS BEEN APPLIED TO WALLS. CEAUSESCU REPORTEDLY FLEW TO SCENE BY HELICOPTER JUNE 3. TOUGH DECREES ALLEGEDLY HAVE GONE OUT TO ALL PROVINCIAL CENTERS AND PLANT MANAGERS TO GUARD AGAINST POSSIBILITY OF MORE SUCH INCIDENTS IN FUTURE. SIX MONTHS MAY BE NEEDED TO GET PLANT BACK ON STREAM, WITH MAIN PROBLEM BEING REPLACEMENT OF DAMAGED GERMAN AND PARTICULARLY JAPANESE EQUIPMENT.

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2. FIRE, WHICH IS STILL UNREPORTED IN ROMANIAN MEDIA, HAS CAUSED MORE SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE CONNECTION BETWEEN RECENT SPATE OF INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS AND ROMANIAN WORKER DISSATISFACTION, PARTICULARLY AFTER SMALLER FIRE AT BRASOV TRACTOR PLANT (WITHOUT SERIOUS DAMAGE) SAME WEEK. ONLY SPECIFIC SUCH REPORT WE HAVE HEARD, HOWEVER, IS FROM GREEK MILITARY ATTACHE, WHO AVERS THAT GREEK WORKERS AT BRASOV PLANT SAW SIGNS OF DISSATISFACTION INCLUDING ANTI-GOVERNMENT SLOGANS PAINTED ON WALLS AND EQUIPMENT, ON GENERAL THEME THAT BENEFITS OF WORKERS' OUTPUT HAS BEEN TAKEN AWAY LEAVING THEM NOTHING BUT MORE LABOR. HOWEVER, ROMANIAN SOURCES OTHERWISE WELL INFORMED ON DETAILS OF BRASOV FIRE HAVE NOT COME UP WITH CONFIRMATION, ALTHOUGH THEY REPORT CURRENT POPULAR SUSPICIONS THAT DRUNKENNESS ON NIGHT SHIFT OR EVEN SABOTAGE WAS INVOLVED. WHILE SEEMING TO LACK HARD INFORMATION, POLISH EMBOFF (RODAK) HAS PEDDLED LINE THAT WORKER DISGRUNTLEMENT MUST SOMEHOW LIE BEHIND ACCIDENTS. OTHER EE DIPLOMATS HAVE POINTEDLY WONDERED WHY WESTERN EQUIPMENT USUALLY SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED (E.G., FALSE TALE THAT IBM PANEL BLEW UP TO CAUSE PITESTI REFINERY FIRE APRIL 14).

3. COMMENT: POPULAR DISSATISFACTION WITH HIGH PRESSURES FOR INDUSTRIAL GROWTH AT EXPENSE OF CONSUMER, LATELY PLAGUED WITH HIGHER PRICES ERODING WAGE INCREASES AND WITH POOR WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS, HAS BEEN CLEAR. HOWEVER, NOTWITHSTANDING THE GREEK REPORT (ABOVE) MOST OF EVIDENCE TO DATE ON BRASOV FIRE AND OTHER RECENT INCIDENTS (REFTEL) IS MORE CONSISTENT WITH WORKER NEGLIGENCE AND INDIFFERENCE, POOR LABOR DISCIPLINE AND ERRANT PLANT SUPERVISION THAT WITH DIRECT INDUSTRIAL SABOTAGE. THAT THE GOR IS TAKING SITUATION SERIOUSLY IS SHOWN BY ROMANIA LIBERA FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL JUNE 10, PART OF ON-GOING CAMPAIGN FOR "ORDER AND DISCIPLINE", WHICH DECRIES NOT ONLY ACCOUNTING VIOLATIONS (AS IN DOLJ) BUT ALSO LAPSES IN FACTORY ACCESS SECURITY. RIGOROUS INVESTIGATION OF BRASOV FIRE EVIDENTLY PREVENTED FIRST SECRETARY TROFIN AND OTHER LOCAL BRASOV LEADERS FROM TOURING US ENVIRONMENT EXHIBIT LAST WEEK AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED.

BARNES

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